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UPCOMING EVENTS

Friday, April 7
Harford County
Celebration of
Agriculture

Wednesday, April 13
Board of Supervisors
Meeting

July 24 - 29
Harford County
Farm Fair

Saturday, August 12
Ag Night at
Ripken Stadium

If you would like to:

- Receive a digital version of this newsletter or
- Would like to submit an article or
- Have an idea for an article...

Please contact the Editor,
Leslie Zink at
leslie.zink@maryland.gov

The Harford Resource

A Publication of the Harford Soil Conservation District

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

APRIL 1, 2017

A “CONSERVATION SYSTEM” Coming Together in White Hall, MD

By Eric Webberking

Many, if not most living creatures, whether people, farm animals, or wildlife follow a set of routines throughout their day. And so it is for the dairy cows at Chris Dixon's farm in White Hall, Maryland.

Several times each day, the milking herd made their way out to the meadow from the barn, over the same worn path. With each trip out, there is a trip back to the barn for milking, eating, or a drink of water.

With such a high volume of four legged traffic this path became quite worn. Dry weather brings uneven footing, with stones of all sizes scattered about. In wet weather, this hard and packed-down path became a mire for the cows to slog through. Soil washed away or dragged out on cow hooves, left a treacherous ledge where the concrete barnyard met the worn cow path.

Maintenance of such an area, by adding stone or scraping mud and manure often proves futile. The worsening condition increases the chance of foot issues and lameness, but also defeats the daily task of trying to keep the cows as clean as possible.

Chris Dixon had an idea of how he would like to improve this problem area of his farm. Working with the **Harford Soil Conservation District**, a plan was developed which looked at addressing several issues, all of which negatively affected the cows, the farm operation, and the environment. Because the situation was an environmental concern, this plan qualified for the “Environmental Quality Incentive Program” (EQIP) and the “Maryland Agriculture Cost-Share Program” (MACS).

This plan consists of several project phases, to be completed over the course of several years. The projects are a system and compliment each other, and consist of:

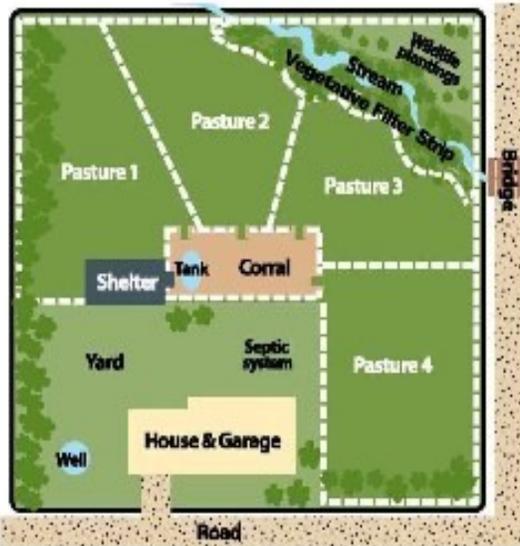
1. A curbed concrete pathway leading to a more stable area of the meadow. A significant amount of manure is dropped on the path during the course of the herd's daily travels. The path is tilted to allow all manure to be scraped or washed by rain, into an existing manure storage tank.
2. Drainage outside of the pathway, which directs clean surface runoff over grass to surface inlets, where it is piped away to grassed outlets.
3. Grassed waterways serve two functions: repair existing gullies that formed in the meadow and serve as outlets for clean water.
4. Fencing to protect the grassed waterways and environmentally sensitive areas from unrestricted access by the cows.
5. A watering trough to provide an alternative to cows drinking from the stream. The waterer will also allow more efficient use of the meadow and reduce some “back and forth” trips by cows to the barnyard for water.

At this time, phases 1 and 2 are completed, with good results so far. With the completion of the remaining phases, we believe that a “Conservation System” will come together with good results for Chris Dixon and his dairy cows.



Good horse pasture management practice recommends **one horse for every two pasture acres**. During a normal growing season, two acres of well-managed pasture should provide adequate grazing and exercise for a horse.

Pasture management is grass farming, treat grasses as a crop!



Example of a small-acreage grazing system with lot and stalls.

Every three years, take a soil sample from the pastures, send it to a soil testing lab for a soil test analysis; lime and fertilize the pastures according to the soil test results; apply herbicide treatment for weed control.

Two acres per horse allows for a practice called “rotational” grazing, which gives the forage time to recover and reduces soil compaction, which can affect the quality of the soil.

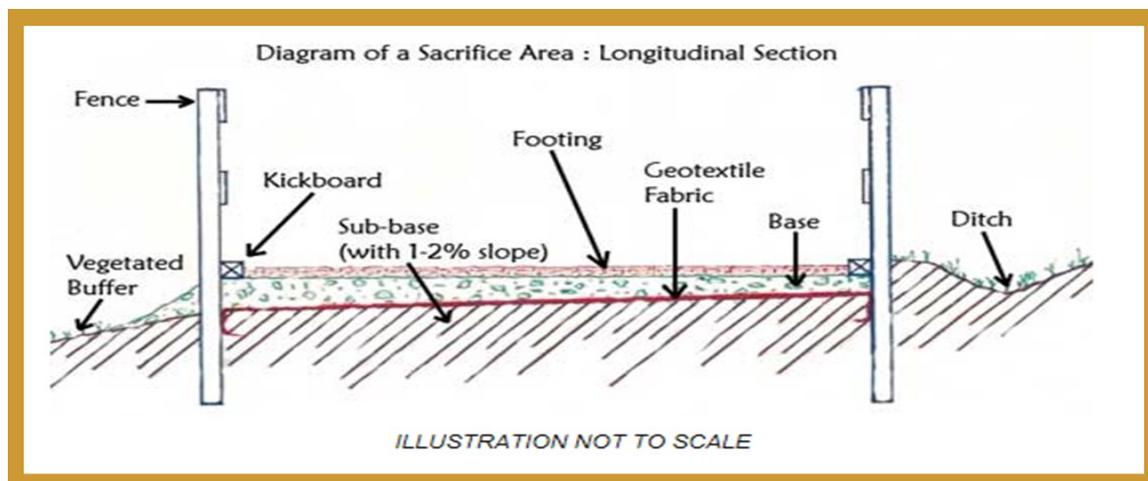
As part of your rotational grazing plan, depending on the number of horses and how many pasture acres, graze each pasture for 3-7 days. Remove the horses when grass reaches a height of 2”-3”, drag the pasture to break up manure, and mow to clip the weeds. Turn out the horses onto the next pasture area when the grass has a regrowth height of 6+ inches.

Horses need to be kept on a sacrifice lot and off the pasture when the soil is saturated, the ground is frozen, during drought conditions, and when the grass needs a rest after grazing. A

sacrifice lot is a small nongrazable paddock/exercise lot to keep the horses when protecting pastures.

A good rule of thumb: If your pasture is too wet to drive a tractor on, then it’s too wet for your horse to graze on. **Use a sacrifice lot when you have wet soil conditions.**

Because of wear and tear, the sacrifice lot may become sparsely vegetated and have bare soil. Grass cover may be nonexistent, becoming muddy in wet or inclement weather. It is acceptable for sacrifice lots to have bare soil or surface materials such as sand, crushed rock, stone dust, wood chip mulch or gravel. A larger sacrifice lot maintaining a grass cover is preferred for environmental reasons. Sacrifice lots should be a minimum of 600 square feet (30' x 20') per horse.



To read more, visit: **HOW** (Horse Outreach Workgroup) at mda.maryland.gov and click on “Management of Established Horse Pastures”.

Student's Corner

by Ashley Lowerly, Megan Bundick, and Sarah Hendrickson

North Harford High School Chestnut Grove



*The American Chestnut tree
(Castanea dentata)*

The Natural Resources Agricultural Magnet Program at North Harford High School has a particular interest in conserving and preserving native Mid-Atlantic flora and fauna. Participating in the physical restoration and scientific research associated with the American Chestnut tree (*Castanea dentata*) was a perfect fit for the students and staff at North Harford. The Natural Resources Strand of the NRAS Magnet Program was granted 50 Chestnut trees to plant on the school campus. Two different backcrossed mother tree varieties, 38 Scrivener trees and 12 WMREC14 trees were included in the study.

Historically, chestnut trees have preferred well drained, gently sloping soils common to the piedmont. Students evaluated different campus locations to plant based on slope and soil type. The sites were presented to the forestry board, and the ideal location was selected. The soil was determined to be Chester silt loams with a 3-8% slope and an average pH of 5.8. Trees were planted on the hillside behind the Hawks stadium.

Ashley Lowerly, Megan Bundick, and Sarah Hendrickson are the Chestnut team and have been monitoring the trees since April 2016, evaluating the trees for disease and measuring mortality and height to track changes over time. Trees are evaluated monthly and measurements taken in April and October. The data is sent to the American Chestnut Foundation providing the preservation organization with valuable information related to the success of their backcrosses. Ninety percent of the planted stock at NHHS remains after the first spring planting. The project gave the team a chance to perform authentic fieldwork and present their findings. The team will continue to monitor the trees and new members will join the team each year to continue the research, and reporting.

*North Harford High students
tending Chestnut trees
planted on the hillside
behind the Hawks stadium.*



Meet Bill Tharpe... District Manager, Harford Soil Conservation District

Bill Tharpe began his journey with the Harford SCD 22 years ago after graduating from West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He has held three different positions for the District. His first position was as the Deer Creek Watershed Planner. He was then promoted to Urban Plans Reviewer and for the last seven years has held the position of District Manager.



As the District Manager, Bill coordinates the administrative functions of the office. This includes, but is not limited to, budget requests, Board meetings, legislative topics and agency reporting along with assisting the Technical team with Best Management Practice design, implementation and financial assistance.

Along with his wife Dana and two sons, Ben (16) and Jacob (2), Bill also operates Level Farm in Churchville. Level Farm is a beef operation which consists of 20 Angus crossbred cow-calf pairs and 30 acres of mixed grass hay. Bill is the 4th generation in his family to farm in Harford County.

Cover Crop Program - Spring Certification Happening NOW!

Spring certification for the 2016-2017 Cover Crop Program is now underway. Here are a few things to remember...

Within two weeks after the kill-down or suppression of the cover crop has been achieved, but no later than **June 2, 2017**, the applicant must certify to the SCD that the cover crop has been suppressed or killed down. The final cost-share payment will be determined by the number of qualified acres which have met all of the program requirements less any fall payments received and not to exceed the approval amount on the original application.

At the time of Spring Certification the applicant must have submitted their Annual Implementation Report (AIR) to the MDA Nutrient Management Program for the previous calendar year in order to meet the nutrient management cross-compliance guidelines. No Spring Payment will be issued until the AIR is complete and on file with MDA.



Have you ever thought about including a "Cage" in your grazing plan?

Grazing Exclusion Cages (pictured at left) are a basic system that can help you keep track of how much forage has been taken and how much remains. They're easy to put up and can be assembled from materials you probably have lying around.

Get more information from the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation at www.noble.org.

What You Need to Know About *Fill Dirt*

by Bill Tharpe



Have you ever been approached about receiving fill dirt? You start thinking about filling ruts in a field or leveling off an area for a new structure and you say, “Sure I can use some fill”. But do you know the rules about bringing fill onto your farm?

By Maryland State Law, any disturbance over 5,000 square feet or borrow/fill area greater than 100 cubic yards require a sediment and erosion control (SEC) plan be prepared to protect the site. Then you remember – agricultural operations are exempt from the grading permit process. The grading permit process is part of the Subdivision Regulation of Harford County with an exemption for agricultural activities. So, you figure there is no problem.

The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) does not reference the use of the property for an exemption but the activity that causes the disturbance. MDE states that agricultural land management practices such as plowing, disking, cultivating, planting and harvesting do not require a SEC plan as well as NRCS approved Best Management Practices. Now it’s starting to become unclear if you can take the fill dirt.



There are parameters that will allow the Harford Soil Conservation District (SCD) to assist a landowner to receive fill dirt over the 100 cubic yard limit. An application to receive fill to an agricultural operation is required to be submitted to the Harford SCD. Information will be added to the Soil and Water Quality Conservation Plan to document the activity. Harford SCD will prepare the sediment and erosion control plan for the fill material up to the following limits:

- 1,000 cubic yards (approximately 100 dump truck loads)
- 1 acre of disturbance
- 10 feet of vertical change

If more than 1,000 cubic yards are needed by the landowner, a sediment and erosion control plan will require a private consultant to prepare, sign and seal the drawing to be submitted to the Harford SCD for review and approval of the plan. Any approved location to receive fill dirt will be inspected by the Harford SCD.

Be sure to contact the **Harford SCD** before agreeing to receive any fill dirt.



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Find Us on the Web at
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Pollinator Friendly Practices



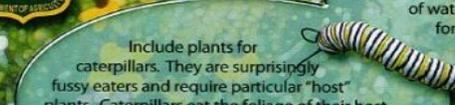
Use native plants since they are adapted to the local climate and soils, and local pollinators are adapted to them.



Plant a variety of flowers to bloom continually from early spring to early fall.



Provide bare ground or a shallow bird bath filled with soil, sprinkled with sea salt and kept moist, to create a source of water and minerals for pollinators.



Include plants for caterpillars. They are surprisingly fussy eaters and require particular "host" plants. Caterpillars eat the foliage of their host plants, but the average gardener won't notice the damage until at least 10% of the leaves are affected.



Provide a variety of flower shapes and colors since different pollinators are attracted to different types of flowers.



Avoid modern hybrids, especially those with "doubled" flowers, since pollen, nectar, and scent can be lost in the cultivation process.



Build a bee condo or leave dead trees or limbs to create nesting habitat for bees.



Help pollinators find the plants they need by planting them in clumps rather than singly. Clustering plants also shortens the distances that pollinators need to travel.



Avoid using pesticides if at all possible. If you want butterflies, you need caterpillars (and the nibbled leaves that go with them)!

